

## Steve Chaney's successful efforts to protect dune ecosystem recognized



The Director's Superintendent of the Year Award for Natural Resource Stewardship went to Steve Chaney, superintendent, Great Sand Dunes National Monument and

Preserve, Colorado. Steve's accomplishments at Great Sand Dunes crown a distinguished career in natural resource management in the National Park Service that includes membership in the initial class of NPS resource management trainees in the early 1980s. His leadership resulted in legislation that created the 42,000-acre (17,010-ha) Great Sand Dunes National Preserve, expanded the Great Sand Dunes National Monument to about 108,000 acres (43,740 ha) and authorized its designation as a national park, and created a new 90,000-acre (36,450-ha) national wildlife refuge. When the land acquisition is complete, the preserve will be a unit of the National Park System in which hunting is permitted and the previously designated monument, plus the newly acquired properties, will become a

national park. These two units combined will be the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. This legislation provides permanent protection for the entire Great Sand Dunes system whereas the original monument boundary encompassed only the high dunes and left out the surrounding sand deposits and watershed elements of the ecosystem, which are critical to its long-term protection.

Passage of this legislation required extensive coalition building with county commissioners, chambers of commerce, private organizations, federal and state agencies, and Congress. Once the land purchase was authorized by Congress, the process of purchasing the land began, involving complex negotiations with many neighbors. The prize for all of this work is that boundaries were drawn on an ecosystem basis, rather than a political basis, placing the entire resource system into a protected status, and creating a huge outdoor laboratory. "Included in this system," Steve says, "is an incredible diversity of resources ranging from pristine tundra to desert environments. The area includes towering 13,000-foot [3,965-m] peaks; sparkling

lakes and streams; forests of pinyon, juniper, spruce, fir, ponderosa pine, aspen, and cottonwood; alpine wildflowers; verdant wetlands; and, of course, the continent's tallest dune field."

To study these widespread resources, Steve has been instrumental in expanding the park's natural resources program. Several species inventories are in progress and more are planned, as is vegetation mapping. Researchers will be accommodated in a new building designed by park staff that includes natural resource staff offices, laboratory facilities, and bunk space for visiting scientists.

In addition to managing his park, Steve is active in helping other parks. Among his activities is membership in the Intermountain Region Natural Resources Communication and Advisory Team where he has chaired efforts to revise the region's procedures for developing and prioritizing resource management funding proposals, in particular to assist smaller parks, and in general to make the entire region more competitive in obtaining support for natural resource research and management. ■

## Greg McGuire stewards his park and more



"Thirty years ago, my next-door neighbor had this job and brought me in as seasonal help. Then he retired and a few years later I got his job," says Greg McGuire, facilities

manager at Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, Maryland. He does that job very well, receiving the Director's Award for Excellence in Natural Resource Stewardship through Maintenance both for adopting energy-efficient and environmentally sensitive practices at his park and for significantly enhancing the surrounding landscape.

Greg's biggest accomplishment was spearheading the cleanup of the tidal wetlands adjacent to the park (featured in *Natural Resource Year in Review—2002*, page 75).

"It was a hideous debris pile," he says, on state-owned land. After a media campaign that Greg instigated, the state called in a contractor to do the cleanup, but the contractor requested \$250,000 just to build a road into the site. Greg told the state, "I'll do the job for \$25,000." To get the job done, Greg created an innovative partnership with the National Aquarium in Baltimore and then presented the project to the public. A large corps of volunteers, including individuals, government agencies, industry, and nonprofits, removed hundreds of tons of debris and invasive vegetation. The eyesore is gone and wetland wildlife is now returning.

At the park, buildings and vehicles have been retrofitted for maximum energy efficiency. Greg was a leader in working out a Green Energy contract with Constellation Energy Group that made it possible to install photovoltaic lighting throughout the park and

a ventilation system that recycles exhaust air to retain heat, convert small Cushman vehicles to natural gas, and install passive solar skylights in a storage building recycled from Gettysburg National Military Park, Pennsylvania.

In addition, he has acquired a power-assisted bicycle to be used when heavier vehicles are not required and a pickup truck that uses natural gas; in diesel-fueled vehicles he uses biodiesel, made from rapeseed (canola). He has reorganized mowing operations to conserve fuel and staff time, installed low-flow toilets, and uses recycled materials wherever possible.

Greg's environment-friendly practices not only benefit the park, but have also broadened the traditional role of the park from that of being interpreter of local history to being active in the conservation of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. ■